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ABSTRACT

On March 6, 1984, Tennessee Governor Lamar Alexander signed into law the Comprehensive Education Reform Act, which its supporters have called the nation's most ambitious statewide teacher career-ladder and incentive-pay program. In its final version, the legislature set up a five-step career ladder with annual salary incentives ranging from $500 to $7,000 for Tennessee's 46,000 teachers. The program promotes staff development among teachers and rewards with substantial pay supplements those teachers who are evaluated as outstanding and who accept additional responsibilities. The five steps of the career-ladder are: (1) probationary teachers; (2) apprentice teachers; (3) career level I teachers; (4) career level II teachers; and (5) career level III teachers. Current teachers have the option of entering the career ladder or staying under the present system, with its 10-year recertification procedures. New teachers will be required to enter the career-teacher program. Program implementation and teacher certification and evaluation under this program are discussed as is the Tennessee Education Association's involvement with it. (JMK)

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What Is a Master Teacher (Career Ladder) Plan?

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WHAT IS A MASTER TEACHER (CAREER LADDER) PLAN?

On March 6, 1984, Governor Lamar Alexander signed into law the Comprehensive Education Reform Act, which its supporters have called the nation's most ambitious statewide teacher career-ladder and incentive-pay program. The career-teacher legislation and the one-cent hike in Tennessee's sales tax, which will raise more than one billion dollars over the next three years for the incentive pay plan and other education measures, went to the governor almost thirteen months after he first proposed a master-teacher plan. This piece of legislation includes four important sections: (1) provisions in it concerned with certification; (2) a career ladder program for teachers, principals, and supervisors; (3) teacher training, and (4) a principal-administrator academy. The emphasis in this paper will focus primarily on provisions of the career-ladder teacher program in Tennessee, or as it was formerly called the Master Teacher Plan.

Teacher Levels

In its final version, the legislature set up a five-step career ladder with annual salary incentives ranging from $500 to $7,000 for Tennessee's 46,000 teachers. The program is designed to promote staff development among teachers and to reward with substantial pay supplements those teachers evaluated as outstanding and who accept additional responsibilities. The five steps are the following:

(1) Probationary Teachers. These are first-year teachers, who will receive state certification after a positive evaluation and a recommendation from their local school board.

(2) Apprentice Teachers. After completing probation, teachers will serve a three-year apprenticeship and receive an annual supplement of $500 as an incentive to stay in the teaching profession. They will be evaluated each year by their local school boards. At the end of the third year, they must receive tenure and move to the next level or lose their jobs.

(3) Career Level I Teachers. Certification at this level is good for five years; teachers receive an annual supplement of $1,000. In addition to normal duties, these teachers will supervise student interns and probationary teachers.

(4) Career Level II Teachers. Certification is good for five years; these teachers are eligible for $2,000 and $4,000 annual salary supplements with 10-month and 11-month contracts, respectively. In addition to normal duties, these teachers will work with remedial and gifted students, as well as supervise apprentice teachers.

(5) Career Level III Teachers. Certification is good for five years; the annual supplements are $3,000 for a 10-month contract, $5,000 for an 11-month contract, and $7,000 for a 12-month contract. In addition to being

eligible for assignments similar to those of career-level II, these teachers will conduct evaluations of career-level teachers who are employed in different school systems.

Each local superintendent will devise a plan consistent with the needs and abilities of the district to utilize the additional months of service required from teachers. If at all possible, each system will include a summer program in order to fully employ those teachers on 11- and 12-month contracts.

Any person duly certified as a career-level teacher will be qualified to teach in any local education agency. Any local board of education will have the authority to employ a teacher with a career level certificate.

If, after the fourth year of implementation, the number of career-level II and III teachers rises by more than five percent in any 12-month period, the State Certification Commission will notify the General Assemblly which then will take such action necessary to protect the fiscal integrity of the career program. It is the intent of the General Assembly that the salary supplements provided for be awarded on the basis of outstanding performance and that the standards utilized for this purpose be kept high.

Implementation

For the purposes of implementing this new certification system and providing the transition opportunity for teachers to

enter the new certification system voluntarily, any public school teacher employed as a certified teacher for at least 12 years is eligible for certification as a career level I, II, or III teacher. Any teacher employed for at least eight years, may become certified as a career-level I or II teacher; any teacher employed for at least three years, as a career-level I teacher.

Current teachers have the option of entering the career ladder or staying under the present system, with its 10-year recertification procedures. New teachers hired after July 1, 1984, will be required to enter the career-teacher program. Under a "fast-track" provision in the legislation, an estimated 32,000 of the state's 46,000 teachers could qualify during the next year for career-level I status and its $1,000 bonus.

Certification

In this career-ladder teacher program, the career-level I teacher certificate is the basic certificate, and the two upper level certificates are supplementary.

Certification will be granted to any eligible teacher who receives a passing score on the National Teachers Exam, Specialty Area Test, or another test selected by the State Certification Commission, and who receives a positive recommendation from the local board based upon teaching performance in the classroom. The local education agency will provide a positive recommendation to the State Certification Commission for all teachers unless the teacher has a history of negative performance evaluations in his

or her file. Teachers who have previously taken the National Teachers Exam and who received scores above the minimum qualifying score adopted by the State Board of Education will not be required to take this test again and may submit adequate evidence of their score to satisfy this requirement.

Any eligible person desiring to become a career-level I teacher may elect to participate in and complete a locally developed staff development program approved by the State Board of Education, which will issue guidelines relating to locally developed staff development programs. After these are issued, any school board seeking approval of its staff development program will submit its program to the State Board of Education for review, and if approved, an eligible teacher's completion of this program will entitle such teachers to certification as a career-level I teacher.

Any person certified and employed full time as a teacher who applies for any career-level certificate and who does not qualify for such certificate will retain the certificate issued prior to the effective date of this piece of legislation for the remainder of the term of that certificate and may renew that certificate in accordance with certain established standards.

Any person applying for a certificate under this new law who is not recommended for certification by the State Certification Commission may request the State Board of Education to review the decision of a Regional Commission or the State Certification Commission within thirty days following the date of the decision.

The state Certification Commission will receive from each Regional Board recommendations for the certification of all apprentice and career-level I teachers. Eight of the nine members of each Regional Board will be teachers selected by the State Certification Commission. The Commission itself will also review and make recommendations to the State Board of Education concerning all applications for career-level II and III teachers, and receive from local school boards of education recommendations for certification of probationary teachers. The policies regarding evaluation standards will be the responsibility of the State Board of Education acting upon the recommendation of the State Certification Commission. It is the intent of the General Assembly and the requirement of this act that the procedure for evaluation assure the educator a fair, objective determination of professional competency and that such procedure be directed toward prevention of discrimination on account of race or sex.

In addition to the other requirements, a teacher with a Bachelor's degree only will complete one academic course as part of the certification renewal process each five years. Credit will be granted only for upper-division level courses in the respective areas of certification which are completed with an attained 3.0 grade point average (on a four-point grading system). A teacher may complete upper division courses in another subject if they are taken with the goal of broadening the areas of certification.

Approximately 33,000 of the state's teachers now have enough years of experience to be eligible for the top two steps of the program. In the 1984-85 school years, an estimated 11,000 teachers can be evaluated for stepping up to career levels II and III. State officials, however, say they do not expect all eligible teachers will seek evaluation.

Evaluation

All teachers certified after the effective date of this act as probationary, apprentice, or career level I teachers and all current teachers who choose to participate in the new career teacher program as career-level I teachers will be evaluated in accordance with the following procedures:

(1) A pre-evaluation interview including identification of performance goals for the teacher

(2) Multiple observations in a varitey of teaching situations

(3) Review of indicators of student progress, where applicable

(4) A formal written evaluation and the performance criteria

(5) A post-evaluation interview in which the specific results of the evaluation are discussed with the teacher

(6) An opportunity for the teacher to respond in writing to the written evaluation.

If the evaluation team finds a teacher to be deficient in the requirements for certification or recertification, it will

inform the Regional Commission and the local education agency. The local school board will then develop an individualized plan to improve that teacher's skills to the minimum standard within six school months. At the conclusion of six months, the State Certification Commission will provide for the re-evaluation of the teacher using the standard evaluation process.

The criteria for the evaluation of career-level II and III teachers are the same except that (1) the classroom observations and assesment will be done by a team of properly trained career-level III teachers or career-level II principals or supervisors from outside the applicants' school system and (2) the review of evaluations will be completed by principals, supervisors and others in authority.

Tennessee Education Association Involvement

The Tennesee Education Association, an affiliate of the National Education Association, opposed this legislation from the time the governor first proposed it until this past January. After the bill was approved by the legislature's two education committees despite T.E.A. opposition, the association held a series of negotiating sessions with House sponsors of the measures. Following those negotiations, T.E.A. leaders endorsed the career-ladder program. For the teachers, the negotiations achieved the protection of their current tenure and negotiating rights, according to Marjorie Pike, T.E.A. president.

The main provision in this regard is the so-called "toe-in-the-water" amendment. Under that amendment, a current teacher entering the career ladder could withdraw at any time and go back under the regular recertification system. In addition, a probationary teacher who was not given tenure and did not move up to career level I in one school district could start over in another district.

Ms. Pike has promised to persuade T.E.A. affiliates and local school boards to accept this new career-ladder program. While legislative sponsors of the measure were divided on how much T.E.A.'s backing helped in the final passage of the bill, they had been unanimous in saying that the association's support is crucial to successful implementation.

Rationale

The legislators who voted for this education reform package sensed they were casting the most important vote of their lives. It will take three to five years to measure the full effect of this career-ladder program. But sponsors of this legislation point to sweeping improvements that should occur in Tennessee's education system: (1) a 50% reduction in the number of teachers who leave teaching because of job dissatisfaction, (2) a 20% decrease in the percentage of students who enter high school but do not graduate, (3) elimination of waivers for teaching outside the area of certification or specialty, (4) a 10% decrease in the percent of students failing the state proficiency test, (5) a

relative increase in test scores of students who take the American College Test or the Scholastic Aptitude Test, (6) a 15% increase in the number of students mastering reading and mathematics as measured on the Basic Skills tests, and (7) a higher quality of people entering the teaching profession.

The career ladder will cost $50 million the first year, but there is $43 million in other classroom improvements. They include: (1) $9 million to give a computer to every 30 children in middle schools, (2) $4 million to buy high-speed readers to grade basic skills exams, (3) $1.2 million more for textbooks, (4) $4.6 million more for instructional supplies, (5) $8.5 million for vocational education, and (6) $1.2 million to take disruptive students out of the classrooms and put them into alternative centers.

Meanwhile, in Tennessee teachers are now ready to make the career-ladder program work. The governor's next battle will be with school boards to make certain that they are giving teachers the chance to make it work. But there are others who have a responsibility to ensure that the plan works - parents and taxpayers. Summing it up, Governor Alexander has said the Comprehensive Education Reform Act gives control of the public schools back to the public. What remains to be seen is whether the public wishes to exercise that control.